implementing the programme if ethanol is made available by the sugar industry at reasonable rates on a sustained basis. The oil marketing companies have invited tenders for procuring ethanol for the EBP in terms of the Gazette Notification No. 705(E) dated 27.10.2004 and the bids received are being evaluated. To ensure the sustained supply of adequate ethanol at reasonable prices to the refining industry, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas have proposed a draft MoU to the Indian Sugar Mills Association. The draft is under discussion.

(c) It is not Government but the assured availability of ethanol at reasonable prices to petroleum refining industry that is the main constraint. Moreover, sugarcane is not grown all over the country. The programme is, therefore, initially being implemented in sugarcane growing States and adjoining areas.

Stock of petroleum products

4290. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the normal stock of petroleum and petroleum products held by the oil companies in the country;

(b) whether this stock has come down anytime during the last three years; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The total crude oil and major product holding capacity with the oil companies provided for a weighted average cover for 61 days on consumption basis and 85 days on net import basis during 2003-04. The inventories have remained more or less within the above range and there was no significant drop of inventories.

(c) Does not arise in view of (a) and (b) above.

Hiring of tankers by IOC and other oil companies for import of crude oil

4291. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have granted permission to Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) to hire tankers for importing crude;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) to what extent this move will allow IOC to cover its freight bill;

(d) by when the other public sector oil refining and marketing companies will be allowed to hire tankers; and

(e) how would the move affect the revenue of transchart, the Centralised Chartering Ship Wing of Shipping Corporation of India?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The world over, major oil companies have their in-house shipping arrangements. Private sector oil companies in India are also free to have their own shipping arrangements. In a deregulated scenario, public sector oil companies have to compete in the market and, therefore, a level playing field between private and public sector oil companies has to be ensured. Therefore, IOCL have been permitted to charter their own tankers for importing crude.

(c) The move will cover the entire freight bill of IOCL on crude import.

(d) Government is not considering any such move for the present.

(e) The Ship Chartering Wing of the Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways is not charging any commission or service fee for chartering foreign flag vessels. However, the commission of 1% is charged on freight and demurrage for Indian flag vessles.

MoU with Myanmar for co-operation in oil sector

4292. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 96 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 1st March, 2005 and state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India has also signed an MoU with the Myanmar Government to enhance co-operation in the oil sector including upstream, downstream and oil marketing; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. During the visit of Minister (P&NG) to Myanmar in January, 2005 an MoU was signed between India and Myanmar for cooperation in the hydrocarbons sector. The MoU envisages cooperation between the parties in the following fields: